

VZCZCXRO9697
OO RUEHCHI RUEHDT RUEHHM
DE RUEHML #1771/01 1500937
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 300937Z MAY 07
FM AMEMBASSY MANILA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6721
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RHHMUNA/CDRUSPACOM HONOLULU HI IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 001771

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/30/2017
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PINS](#) [KISL](#) [MY](#) [RP](#)
SUBJECT: ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL MEETS WITH GOVERNMENT
PEACE PROCESS LEADERS

REF: A. MANILA 1543

[1](#)B. MANILA 1337
[1](#)C. MANILA 952
[1](#)D. MANILA 281

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney for
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: EAP Assistant Secretary Hill and Ambassador underscored U.S. interest in a successful peace process in Mindanao in a May 25 meeting with key Philippine contacts involved in Mindanao and in peace talks with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. Malaysian-sponsored talks will resume once the Philippine government clarifies its latest offer on territory. The government's goal is to supplant regular August 2008 elections in Mindanao with a transitional council for a new Muslim political entity. U.S. quiet diplomacy, along with assistance programs from USAID and the U.S. military as well as ship visits, is keeping the government and Muslim leaders focused on a successful peace process, which would strengthen the Philippines as a partner and help deny sanctuary to terrorists. End Summary.

Status of MILF Negotiations

[1](#)2. (C) While in Manila to attend the ASEAN Regional Forum Senior Officials Meeting (septels) on May 25, EAP A/S Hill and Ambassador Kenney met with Secretary Silvestre "Yong" Afable, lead Philippine government negotiator with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), and Major-General Ben Dolorfino, the Armed Forces of the Philippines' most senior Muslim officer, who heads the North Capital Region command as well as the Ad Hoc Joint Action Group in Mindanao. DCM and EAP Special Assistant Gibbons also attended.

[1](#)3. (C) Afable described the main issue in negotiations -- territory -- and specifically how much additional territory to add to the existing Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) to form a new Muslim autonomous political entity. The government has offered to add 600 Muslim-majority villages, many non-contiguous to the ARMM. The MILF had demanded half of Mindanao, based on historical Muslim majorities. Malaysian facilitators have helped scale back MILF demands, and now differences exist in just a couple of provinces, according to Afable. President Arroyo had decided to wait until after the May 14 elections to decide how much leeway the government would have. Afable commented that a deal is within reach, but that it would depend on genuine political will in Manila to offer some Christian-majority municipalities to the new Muslim-led political entity. Afable said that the Malaysians would host another informal round as soon as the Philippine government's position is

clearer. In response to A/S Hill's inquiry, Afable praised the Malaysian role, as well as U.S. support and growing interest from Canada, Japan, and others.

Status of MNLF in Jolo

14. (C) MG Dolorfino recalled how Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) founder and chairman Nur Misuari had led a breakaway group into armed rebellion in 2001, complaining about the implementation of the peace agreement the MNLF signed in 1996. Hundreds died in battles with the Philippine military, with more recent deadly clashes in February 2005 and again in April 2007 on Jolo island. After capture in and extradition from Malaysia, Misuari remains under house arrest and on trial in Manila, although Philippine authorities permitted him to run for Sulu governor in May (he lost). MG Dolorfino confirmed that MNLF commands remain intact in camps in several parts of Jolo. He described his role as an emissary to MNLF commanders, who have agreed to let AFP troops operate in their areas. He added that fighting with rogue MNLF commander Habier Malik had now dissipated.

Reaching peace by 2008?

15. (C) Afable and Dolorfino described how the government's recent offer of self-determination would require the MILF, MNLF, and local Muslim political leaders to figure out how to govern themselves, which would take a transition period of three to five years. The Malaysians and the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) are trying to broker a meeting between MILF and MNLF leaders, which they noted would be a

MANILA 00001771 002 OF 002

significant achievement. Afable predicted that Muslim leaders would eventually establish a consultative council of regional leaders, senior to a parliament. The OIC, which recognizes Misuari and the MNLF as the sole representatives of Muslims in the Philippines, plans to hold a tri-partite conference of the Philippine government, MNLF, and OIC in July to review implementation of the 1996 agreement. Afable said that the timeline for completing MILF territory negotiations and bringing Muslim leadership together was tight, given the government's goal of supplanting regular ARMM elections in August 2008 with a transitional council for the new Muslim political entity. Afable commented that, if the parties miss that deadline, it would be very difficult to implement a new agreement during the Arroyo presidency.

16. (C) A/S Hill and Ambassador reiterated the strong U.S. interest in and support for a successful peace process for the benefit of the peoples of Mindanao and to strengthen the Philippines as a partner. They underscored that such success would also help to banish terrorists from both Jolo and central Mindanao. Afable agreed that a successful peace process would enable MILF and MNLF leadership to become more fully cooperative in eradicating terrorists from certain commands that now give them sanctuary, and to enter normal governing structures.

17. (C) Comment: Our quiet diplomacy with the MILF Central Committee and the Philippine government has helped keep them focused on the benefits of peace. Assistance programs by USAID and the U.S. Special Operations Task Force-Philippines, as well as the impact of ship visits such as the USS Blue Ridge, USNS Mercy, and, next month, the USS Pelelieu, further enhance our leverage and enable us more clearly to demonstrate to Muslim leaders and citizens throughout Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago these benefits. Once the mid-term election counting is complete, the Embassy will again intensify travels to the region to press for peace in key localities.

18. (U) A/S Hill did not have the opportunity to review this message.

Visit Embassy Manila's Classified SIPRNET website:
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eap/manila/index.cfm>

You can also access this site through the State Department's
Classified SIPRNET website:
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/>
KENNEY